

Culture and Communicative Language Teaching In Language Classrooms: Libyan Students in University Language Centers.

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ABSTRACT

Current domains of teaching and learning require effective ideas, instructions, and instructional methods for teaching languages. Classrooms that teach languages need to identify the most effective teaching and learning methods. In order to fulfill the needs of the learners of that time period, a number of theories have been developed over the years. Many contemporary theories have been established as a result of the rapid development of social and cultural contexts. A literature review of the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach, as well as pertinent teaching and learning approaches and tactics, is presented in the study under review. In order to determine whether a CLT strategy is advantageous in the current classroom environment, the researcher analyzed some historical and some current articles. To help language teachers find and implement appropriate teaching and learning strategies for their students with varied social or cultural backgrounds, this document provides a useful overview.

KEYWORDS: *Communicative language teaching, Culture, Foreign language learning, Language teaching, English language learning.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

A rapid growth has been found in the variety of ESL students over the world. Many Libyan learners need to learn English as a second language in order to follow their studies such as PhDs and MAs in foreign countries or for training courses. Regardless of the fact that some Libyan learners' English is relatively good, many come across some problems in communicating either with other students or with native speakers as a result of the absence of teaching culture in Libyan classes and because of the lack of well structured communicative language teaching in the classroom.

Many researchers assume that by mastering the language; people can be capable to communicate with others. The usage of language is considered as the only aspect that is required so as to communicate with other people who do not share the same language. On the other hand, Ledbury (2004) claims that the language is not regarded as a main tool of communication. The ability to communicate with others in different cultures is much more beneficial rather than mastering the rules of the target language. In addition, the capability of mastering the rules of the target language and the principles of culture is considered essential to guarantee the effortlessness of communication. Miscommunications between people can occur due to lack of cultural awareness. These miscommunications might happen due to the misapprehensions which are credited to unanticipated manner or unsuitable practice of language.

This essay will examine the importance of teaching culture as an integral part in learning the language as well as teaching CLT within Libyan students at universities language centers. It is divided into four sections. The first section will supply some definitions of culture. The second section will examine the correlation between language and culture from diverse perspectives. The third section will clarify the relationship between culture and non-verbal communication and its importance in the classroom. The fourth section will consider the Libyan cultural context with mentioning Libyan students' needs who have been offered to study abroad, and present some challenges which face Libyan teachers which impede learners' needs from achieving their objectives. Finally, some techniques can be suggested to help students improve their communicative competence through teaching culture.

CLT has been universally investigated and studied by numerous scholars in the English language teaching field. Many studies have been conducted regarding the use of CLT in different EFL contexts, such as Ellis (1996); Li (1998), Gorsuch (2000) and Rao (2002). However, as far as the present researcher is aware, there has been no study conducted on teaching Culture and CLT to Libyan students in University language

centres. Thus, the research should shed light on the almost neglected area of research in University Language Centres.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Definitions of culture.

This part attempts to discuss the definition of culture, various scholars in different domains for example anthropology, sociology have elucidated and defined the term culture in a number of ways. The following section will focus on two types of definitions of how culture and communication is associated together.

For anthropologists, culture is an extremely broad term which consists of our patterns social activities which has a serious influence on the communication, attitudes and many social patterns. Therefore, the literature continually highlights the importance of culture. In spite of the variation in defining the term culture it is strongly associated with communication. For example, Hall defined culture as "the way of life of a people. It is the sum of their learned behaviour patterns, attitudes, and material things". (1969, p. 20). Culture is a main tool which involves people to learn and share different cultures. For that reason, learning and sharing cultures among people entails communication.

It is crucial to point out that there seems to be a difference figured by Brooks (1960) between "culture which begins with a capital "C" that is used to refer to literature, customs, music and political beliefs, and "culture with small "c" which is referred to the behavior and the way of living of daily life. This difference has assisted people to modify their vision that majority of researchers thought of culture as only an image of art, music, attitudes and the same.

A great number of researchers seem to agree that culture fundamentally is composed of life's manner, morals, beliefs, attitudes and symbols which differentiate between people. According to Byram says that "Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behavior acquired and transmitted by symbols, constitute the distinctive achievements of human groups, including their embodiments in artifacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e. historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values. (1994, p. 3).

The correlation between language and culture.

It is generally established that learning a second or a foreign language is not simply achieving an aim of academic study but rather the focus is on learning how to communicate with others. Krashen (1993). Language tends to be a major part of culture and has a pivotal place in acquiring the target language. Studying another culture has an enormous impact on students' motivation to learn the target language and enhances tolerance of other perspectives and diverse ways of behavior.

According to Byram (1994) language is considered as a mirror of culture which has a great influence on formulating the language. Ideas about cultures can be exchanged in order to communicate with different people from various countries, so learning about culture through language is useful. In addition, every language which is used for communication represents a group of people for the reason it contains a historical and cultural environment as well as the way of existing and thinking. Language and culture are not simply separate but clearly complementary to each other." According to Brown "A language is a part of culture and culture is part of language: the two are intractably interwoven so that one cannot separate the two without losing the significance of either language or culture". (2000, p. 177).

Buttjes, (1990) and many other researchers believe that language and culture are from the start inseparably connected (cited in Lessard-Clouston, 1997). He argues that the integration is caused by the process of acquiring the language which is varied from culture to another. Ellis (1990) believes that learners who are involved in the cultural life of the target language have the ability to learn the second language without difficulty compared with other students.

On the other hand, it has been observed that learning the language tends to be separated from learning the culture and the majority of ESL students have mastered the second language in different fields but without exposure to the culture of the target language. According to Sapir (1921) states that language and culture are not essentially connected and students can learn the language without exposure to the culture.

Libyan teachers of English separate teaching culture from teaching the target language, and it tends to be a disregarded part in learning process. Acquiring vocabulary and grammar was the main focus rather than teaching culture which help students to communicate. This may be due to the lack of teachers' cultural background of the target language and using grammar method which impede students from developing their communicative ability to achieve their goals. Farah (2010) claims that avoidance of teaching culture in Arab classes including Libya can be a result of the different cultures which may not be suitable for Libyan context and possibly alienate students in this process.

Culture and non-verbal communication.

The dictionary of Language Teaching of Applied Linguistics defines non- verbal communication as "communication without the use of words. This could be done, for instance by gestures or signs". (2002, p. 362).

Humans communicate either through words (verbally) or through signs and movements (non-verbally). Non- verbal communication is regarded as a means of communication purpose and relates to human behavior.

Jandt (2001) recognizes that through using non-verbal communication which is accompanied with intended or not intended oral discourse the meaning can be received without using words. Non- verbal communication involves emotions and attitudes which can be exposed in various gestures and movements. These might be received by facial expressions, body language and other movements. On the other hand, Verbal communication needs a language; this language is a set of labels which can be used to symbolize estimations of space time, actions and thoughts. People can exchange the spoken language by using these labels which consist of range of means such as vocalization, writing and many others. (Jandt, 2001).

To some extent, it is true to say that non- verbal communication is related to classroom teaching. As suggested by Lidbury (2004), it plays a great role in teaching process. For instance, learners can use gestures and facial expressions to act out a dialogue or mime (simple adjectives, nouns, verbs etc.).

According to Zeki (2009), unfortunately, some teachers disregard or underestimate the importance of using non-verbal communication in the classroom. This will have negative influence on students because of lack of awareness of non-verbal communication. The latter is regarded as a powerful tool to convey the meaning.

Body language has a strong influence on interaction between people from various cultures but these expressions are difficult to recognize for other people from different cultures, because of the traditions and values of each country. Twati (2006) states that these facial expressions could not be expected and recognized by other people from diverse cultural backgrounds which have been caused many problems for Libyan learners in particular countries.

In Libyan culture, body language seems to be a crucial part of language which has a strong affect on communication. For example, Libyan students fold their hands in the classroom as a kind of respect. This also indicates that the students are completely absorbed the lesson. Nonetheless, "Not all people in a particular culture engage in the same nonverbal actions, so interpretations of nonverbal communication must be carefully evaluated before generalizations can be made". (Samovar, Porter, 1998, p. 248). As shown above non- verbal communication is important for students to know how to communicate with native speakers. The following section will identify students' needs in Libyan Language Centers.

The Libyan cultural context and students' needs.

According to Vandewalle (2006) as a raising country, Libya has a high proportion of educated people contrasted with other Arab countries. Education is gratis from primary school until the university. Post-graduate students are permitted to complete their higher education abroad. Vandewalle (2006) states that Libya has a high standard of living among other African countries; there have been attempts by the Libyan administration to upgrade principles of education in Libya.

According to Zahrana, (2009) Arab countries including Libya are considered to be wealthy of various cultures and values. (Zahrana, 2009, cited in Hall, 1990). A great effort has been achieved by the Libyan government to promote the education system in Libya. A good example of that is LETUP (Libyan English Teaching in universities projects). A study by British council states that there is an agreement between the British council and higher education in Libya which was established in 2006. The majority of competent tutors have been employed from the British council to present English courses to post – graduate students to develop their English communication skills and to train the local Libyan teachers in order to increase the quality of good teachers in teaching English.

English in Libya is taught as a foreign language and there seems to be a tendency to teach general English rather than English for specific purposes. Large numbers of Libyan students are studying in Language Centers and they come with different needs. Some students have scholarships and looking to pursue their higher studies such as MA and PHD abroad in order to speak fluently with international people in places such as the street and restaurant, and the rest come for professional purposes for instance, to get job in a company to communicate with native speakers where English is the spoken language. According to Hinkle" ... exposure to and communicative interaction in an L2 enables learners to attain speaking fluency". (2006, p. 115).

From my personal experience, learners need to learn English in order to communicate either with other students in the classroom or with native speakers. Unfortunately, some Libyan learners have difficulties in achieving their needs in learning the target language through communication which could be result of the lack of well structured communicative language teaching in the classroom.

According to Hedge: "To be able to operate effectively in the real world, students need plenty of opportunity to practise language in situations which encourage them to communicate their needs, ideas and

opinions" (2000, p. 44). As well, Libyan students need to be familiar with the English culture in order to communicate to learn the language; however Libyan teachers consider that learning a number of vocabulary and grammar is the best way to teach the language. According to Thanasoulas (2001) learning the culture raises not only the knowledge of the target culture but also can help in communication with others. To conclude, Libyan learners would not be able to achieve their needs in mastering the language through communication, so the following section will discuss some difficulties which face Libyan teachers in preparing these students. So learners need CLT, Hymes (1979) declares that CLT can be a significant way which allows students to contact with the target language in meaningful context. Learners will be able to use the language according to the setting, for instance, Libyan students need to know when formal and informal speech can be used to communicate appropriately with native. Murphy (1986) states that by using CLT in the classroom learners' first language have no particular role and the native language can be ignored.

According to Cook "... Communication means basing classroom teaching in communication and so leads to techniques that make the students communicate with each other (2008, p.248).

III. CHALLENGES WHICH LIBYAN TEACHERS FACE IN PREPARING LIBYAN STUDENTS WHO ARE GOING ABROAD

Discussions about the difficulties which teachers encounter in monolingual classrooms in Libya have been discussed by group of scholars. Fareh (2010) identifies some problems which face Arab teachers, particularly Libyan teachers and what can be suggested to improve the circumstances.

The lack of well-structured communicative language teaching which has a vital role in the teaching process can be an obstacle for many Libyan teachers because of the focus on grammar rules rather than on communication. According to Barton (1968) In Libya, teachers are pursuing grammar translation method which emphasized acquiring vocabulary through reading.

Fareh (2010) argues that in order to provide good opportunities for learners to be successful and cooperative, teachers should encourage students to participate in communicative activities by reducing teachers talk time (TTT) and focus on communicative activities which can help learners to increase their communicative capabilities and help students to create spoken English in communicatively proficient way. In addition, some Libyan teachers do not have a sufficient cultural knowledge about the target culture, from my experience as a Libyan teacher; dealing with the second language culture can be a challenge for number of teachers because of the huge differences between the two cultures. Jandt, (2001) claims that the study of communication should not be separated from teaching culture and communication can be clearly recognized with a comprehending of the target culture.

Fenner (2008) believes that it is important for teachers to increase their views towards culture in order to help students to share and exchange ideas about the target culture.

As shown above the teacher should has an essential role in the classroom as Fareh argues that "teachers play a vital role in the teaching- learning classroom, the teachers are one of the major pillars of success in the teaching-learning context"(2010, p. 3601). The role of the tutor seems to have many aspects. The awareness of the attitudes of the target culture can be a challenge for many Libyan teachers in monolingual classrooms.

Prodomou (1992) declares that learning about the target culture can be beneficial for the instructor since it is a significant element in language learning. A study has examined by Prodomou on a number of adult Greek students at the British Council, he deduced that a large number of students who he interviewed were supported the idea that the teacher should be conscious of the target culture.

Another challenge that faces teachers is that textbook might not satisfy students' needs because of the different cultural backgrounds. For instance, from my experience as Libyan teacher is that some lessons in English course books such as Face to Face and Cutting Edge are containing inappropriate lessons for Libyan culture. So many students face difficulties in coping with textbooks because some activities are designed for learners in various cultural backgrounds and some lessons are not pertinent to students' culture so learners become de- motivated and passive students. Fareh states that "textbooks are written by native speakers, who more often than not, have no adequate background about the learners and their needs on their linguistic background"(2010, p. 3603).

One of the main problems that Libyan tutors encounter is discovering suitable genuine texts so as to facilitate the materials. There has been an improvement in using authentic texts in the Libyan classrooms which supply students with a number of authenticities. However, the difficulty in Libyan context is that despite of the little use of conversation based methods in some classes, a challenge of many tutors seems to be still remained to establish real materials that can be useful in the classroom. Some teachers depend on using the internet which is a precious technique but it is still limited.

Furthermore, another significant complexity is avoiding stereotypes in teaching the target culture; some teachers are generating untrue stereotypes of the target culture. According to Guest (2002) contrasting cultures can lead to overgeneralize unrealistic background about the target culture. Moreover an assessment of TESOL

materials is done by Clarke (1990) shows that the overgeneralization which is made whether by the teacher or by the students can produce unrealistic stereotyped image of the target culture. However, Clarke, (1990) declares that stereotypes can be stable and can not be alternative but overgeneralizations are elastic and can be change with the experience. According to British Council (2009) In order to overcome these problems teachers should be prepared to many courses from Cambridge University such as TKT which is (Teaching Knowledge Test), it aims to improve teachers' confidence by focusing on the basis teaching knowledge and ICALT qualification (In-service Certificate of English Language Teaching). These courses can train teachers to develop their abilities to be well qualified to prepare the students to study abroad.

IV. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Teaching knowledge of the target language can not be merely necessity for tutors, teachers seem to be responsible to teach students the culture of the target language in order to enhance the learners' communicative capability. Hughes (1992) the fundamental aspect to achieve teaching culture is to select appropriate cultural materials which can be suitable for learners' needs.

Learning culture through media.

According to Hughes (1992) reading magazines and newspapers can be useful for teachers to discover good cultural insights through reading the newspapers. It might be accessible in the classroom either to help students achieve their assignments or only for browsing. The benefit of creating activities by providing newspapers in the classroom is that learners are exposed to genuine language in order to use the target language appropriately. In addition, the students who are not influenced with the target language can acquire some cultural background from the newspapers. Seelye (1993) states that learners need to produce some theories before create any cultural generalization. The theories are clearly focused on experiential evidence. Tutors need some preparation in order to build up learners' skills that are required to go through the mass media. According to Brooks (1968) teaching culture through textbooks with providing some authentic reading materials is being a very helpful way which can help students to acquire knowledge about the target culture.

It can be clearly beneficial for the teacher to adopt some good newspapers, stories and poems they can be vital contents for classroom training because some textbooks ca not satisfy all students' needs. According to Torres & Hutchinson "A textbook cannot meet the needs of any individual teaching – learning situations nor the needs of the individuals within it" (1994, p. 325).

Learning culture through realia.

Moreover, numerous numbers of teachers support the idea of using authentic materials in classrooms. Providing realia such as posters, films, maps and pictures are beneficial to illustrate the life of other people; also it can generate a visual and concrete presence of the target culture. According to Hughes (1992) the teacher should cautiously choose films and pictures which can demonstrate particular element of cultural behavior and exemplify the style of living. In addition, it should also be relevant and appropriate to students' culture. Hughes (1992) it can be valuable if the tutor assists students to benefit from the stories and clarify the living experience of the target culture and examine the content of the target culture through the realis.

Ethnographic Studies

An effective way for students to learn about the target language and culture is to send them into their own community to find information. Students can carry out ethnographic interviews with native speakers in the community, which they can record in notebooks or on audiotapes or videotapes. Discussion activities could include oral family histories, interviews with community professionals, and studies of social groups. It is important to note that activities involving the target-language community require a great deal of time on the part of the teacher to help set them up and to offer ongoing supervision.

V. CONCLUSION

This study emphasizes the importance of teaching culture and CLT in Libyan classes. Therefore, the correlation between language and culture is being connected and any trying to divide language and culture is supposed to be failure. A neutral focus on increasing the linguistics of the language alongside the cultural awareness should be involved in the Libyan syllabus. Learners will have the ability to enhance their knowledge of the target culture. Depending on the fact that the emphasize on learning the language without raising culture in the classroom can leads to teach valueless symbols of language and learners may acquire incorrect meaning.

Furthermore, non-verbal communication is a vital part in teaching and learning. Teachers should be aware of its importance since it is regarded as a tool of convey meaning. Teaching culture with teaching the language can help to train students to embrace the target culture and decrease the cultural shock which the majority of Libyan students undergo when they study abroad. This might be a result of the challenges which

face Libyan teachers because of the absence of the lack of well structured communicative approach in classroom. As well, textbooks seem to be an obstacle for teachers because it can not satisfy students' needs and cultural backgrounds. Many techniques have been mentioned that may raise the importance of the cultural communication in Libyan classes which provide a great opportunity to learn language.

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